

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 5991

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PINT MPOL LE SY EG
SUBJ: LEBANESE LEFTIST VIEW OF RECENT EVENTS IN ME

1. NOT RELEASABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONALS.
2. SUMMARY. IN A CONVERSATION WITH AN EMBOFF ON NOVEMBER 30, INDEPENDENT NASSERIST OFFICIAL SAMIR SABBAGH REPEATED HIS OPPOSITION TO THE SADAT VISIT AND CAIRO CONFERENCE, BUT PROFESSED UNDERSTANDING OF THE U.S. POSITION ON THESE ISSUES. SABBAGH BELIEVED THAT A SOLUTION FOR THE SOUTH WAS "BLOCKED" AND INCREASED MILITARY ACTIVITY LIKELY. HE CLAIMED THAT SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM HAD AGREED NOT TO PUT FURTHER PRESSURE ON THE PALESTINIANS TO WITHDRAW. SABBAGH SAID THAT THE INDEPENDENT NASSERISTS WOULD ACCEPT THE NATIONAL PACT OF 1943 AS THE BASIS FOR POLITICAL RECONCILIATION IN LEBANON, BUT THOUGHT THAT REAL PROGRESS TOWARDS RECONCILIATION WAS VERY UNLIKELY BECAUSE THE CHRISTIANS REFUSED TO SUPPORT THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE. END SUMMARY.
3. SAMIR SABBAGH, A MEMBER OF THE COMMAND COUNCIL OF THE INDEPENDENT

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PENDENT NASSERIST MOVEMENT (AL MOURABITOUN) OFFERED THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS TO AN EMBOFF ON NOVEMBER 30:

4. SADAT VISIT AND THE CAIRO CONFERENCE.
--THE INDEPENDENT NASSERISTS UNEQUIVOCALLY OPPOSED SADAT'S VISIT TO ISRAEL AND THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, BECAUSE THEY WERE AIMED AT CONCLUDING A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND ABANDONING THE

PLO. NEVERTHELESS, SADAT HAD ADMITTEDLY "SCORED SOME POINTS." IN PARTICULAR, THE EGYPTIAN PEOPLE SURPRISINGLY SUPPORTED RATHER THAN OPPOSED THE VISIT.

--RATHER THAN RECOGNIZING THE PLO AS THE LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, SADAT HOPED TO PERSUADE NON-PLO PALESTINIANS TO ATTEND A PEACE CONFERENCE AND TO AGREE TO SOME SORT OF FEDERATION BETWEEN THE WEST BANK AND JORDAN. THE PLO HAS NOT RECEIVED AN INVITATION TO THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, BUT SOME WEST BANK PALESTINIANS HAVE. (THE LOCAL PRESS HAS SAID THE PLO DID RECEIVE AN INVITATION.)

--THE INM UNDERSTOOD THE NEED FOR THE UNITED STATES NOT TO ABANDON ITS ALLIES AND TO SUPPORT SADAT'S VISIT AND ATTEND THE CAIRO CONFERENCE. THE EQUIVOCAL RESPONSE OF SAUDI ARABIA AND JORDAN TO THE SADAT VISIT SHOWED IN SABBAGH'S VIEW THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS NOT ENTIRELY HAPPY WITH THE RECENT TURN OF EVENTS.

--THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT AND PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE WERE STILL TRYING TO EVALUATE THE REAL POSITION OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSAD. IT WAS NOT CERTAIN WHETHER ASSAD WAS REALLY OPPOSED TO SADAT'S VISIT OR WAS ENGAGED IN A THEATRICAL "SCENARIO" DESIGNED TO CAMOUFLAGE SYRIAN SUPPORT.

5. THE SOUTH.

--ANY SOLUTION FOR SOUTH LEBANON WAS "BLOCKED" FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE. THE CHRISTIANS AND ISRAELIS REFUSED TO IMPLEMENT A "BALANCED" SOLUTION UNDER WHICH CHRISTIAN MILITIA WOULD WITHDRAW AS WELL AS PALESTINIAN AND NATIONAL MOVEMENT FIGHTERS.

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--WHEN SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM CAME TO LEBANON ON NOVEMBER 23 (SEE BEIRUT 5860), HE ASKED YASIR ARAFAT TO WITHDRAW PALESTINIAN FORCES FROM SOUTH LEBANON. ARAFAT REFUSED, HOWEVER, BECAUSE THE CHRISTIANS REFUSED TO WITHDRAW AS WELL. KHADDAM THEN AGREED THAT SYRIA WOULD PUT NO MORE PRESSURE ON THE PALESTINIANS AND WOULD ACQUIESCE IN THEIR MAINTAINING THE PRESENT POSITIONS.

--THERE WAS LIKELY TO BE AN INCREASE IN MILITARY ACTIVITY IN SOUTH LEBANON. THE STATES OF THE "ARAB REJECTION FRONT" BELIEVED THAT SOUTH LEBANON WAS THE SOLE AREA WHERE THEY COULD PREVENT SADAT FROM ATTAINING HIS GOAL OF A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH THE ISRAELIS. THESE STATES WOULD SEEK TO USE THE PLO TO STEP UP FIGHTING IN THE SOUTH TO DISRUPT SADAT'S STRATEGY. AL MOURABITOUN SUPPORTED THE REJECTION FRONT STATES IN THIS EFFORT.

6. POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

--IT WAS NECESSARY TO ARRIVE AT LEBANESE POLITICAL RECONCILIATION AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT LEBANON COULD DEVOTE HER ENERGIES TO THWARTING SADAT. THUS AL MOURABITOUN HAD DECIDED IT WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT UNCHANGED THE NATIONAL PACT OF 1943 AS THE BASIS FOR RECONCILIATION, EVEN THOUGH THEY WOULD WORK FOR SOME MINOR MODIFICATIONS OF THIS FORMULA.

--AL MOURABITOUN ATTACHED ONLY TWO CONDITIONS TO ITS WILLING-

NESS TO ACCEPT THE NATIONAL PACT: (A) THAT ALL PARTIES ENDORSE THE INDEPENDENCE AND UNITY OF LEBANON, AND (B) THAT ALL PARTIES RECOGNIZE THE "ARAB NATURE" OF LEBANON. THIS LATTER CONDITION MEANT THAT THE CHRISTIANS WOULD HAVE TO SUPPORT RATHER THAN ATTACK THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE AND WORK TO IMPLEMENT RATHER THAN BLOCK THE CAIRO ACCORD.

--AL MOURABITOUN COMPLETELY SUPPORTED THE EFFORTS OF PRESIDENT SARKIS AND WOULD ENDORSE ANY FORMULA FOR RECONCILIATION HE ACCEPTED. AL MOURABITOUN HAD NOT YET INITIATED DIALOGUE WITH THE OTHER SIDE BUT WAS READY TO DO SO. AL MOURABITOUN BELIEVED THAT A DIALOGUE SHOULD BEGIN IMMEDIATELY AND THAT THE ISSUES OF THE SOUTH AND POLITICAL RECONCILIATION SHOULD BE SEPARATED.

--THE PROSPECTS FOR MEANINGFUL PROGRESS ON POLITICAL RECONCILIATION AT THIS TIME ARE SLIGHT, HOWEVER. THE CHRISTIANS ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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MOST UNLIKELY TO RECOGNIZE THE ARAB NATURE OF LEBANON.

7. COMMENTS.

A. WHILE DENOUNCING SADAT'S VISIT AND THE CAIRO CONFERENCE, SABBAGH MADE A POINT OF PROFESSING SYMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING FOR THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH REQUIRED THE UNITED STATES TO BACK THE EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT. HIS COMMENTS ON ASSAD ADD TO THE EVIDENCE THAT FATAH, WITH WHOM THE INDEPENDENT NASSERISTS HAVE VERY CLOSE TIES, IS NOT RUSHING INTO THE SYRIAN CAMP. HIS PESSIMISTIC APPRAISAL OF THE LIKELIHOOD OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA III IS, WE FEAR, REALISTIC.

B. SABBAGH'S EXPLICIT ENDORSEMENT OF THE NATIONAL PACT IS THE FIRST BY AL MOURABITOUN SINCE THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR. AT FIRST BLUSH, IT CAN BE TAKEN AS A FURTHER INDICATION THAT THE MUSLIM LEFT IS PREPARED TO RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. NEVERTHELESS, WE SUSPECT THAT THIS POSITION IS BASICALLY TACTICAL, DESIGNED TO COUNTER CHRISTIAN CHARGES THAT THE LEFT HAS PAN-ARAB RATHER THAN LEBANESE INTERESTS AT HEART. SABBAGH DOUBTLESS KNOWS, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THE LEBANESE FRONT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY REJECT AS A CONDITION FOR RECONCILIATION HIS DEMAND THAT THE CHRISTIANS NOT OPPOSE PALESTINIAN ACTIVITIES IN LEBANON.

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